The Ballarat Naturalist

April 2020

Images from February's excursion to the Western Treatment Plant.

Orange-bellied Parrot
Neophema chrysogaster

Photos: Carol Hall

Black-shouldered Kite
Elanus notatus

More images and a report on pages 13 and 14

Minutes of the 67th Annual General Meeting March 6, 2020

President John Gregurke warmly welcomed 28 members.

Apologies received from: Chris & Anna Baulch, Ken Hammond, Shirley Faull, Mark Moravec, Elaine Gregurke, Rob Scott, Wayne McGuire, Paul Norquay and Wayne Walker.

Motion: That the apologies be accepted.

Moved: F. Hanrahan Seconded: D. Thurgood Carried.

Minutes of 66th Annual General Meeting were read by the Secretary, Emily Noble.

Motion: That the Minutes of the previous AGM are a true and correct record.

Moved: C. Hall Seconded: A. Arnold Carried.

President's Report: President John Gregurke gave his Annual President's Report detailing a busy, interesting and fruitful year of activities, excursions and speakers.

Motion: That the Annual President's Report be accepted.

Moved: J. Gregurke Seconded: J. Mildren Carried.

Treasurer, Kathy Elder presented the Annual Treasurer's Report, illustrating that the Club was maintaining a strong and stable financial position.

Motion: That the Annual Treasurer's Report be accepted.

Moved: K. Elder Seconded: C. Dalman Carried.

Election of Office Bearers:

President John Gregurke stepped down from the Presidency and handed over to Peter Dalman to oversee the election of office bearers and general committee members. Peter thanked the committee for its work over the past year to ensure the smooth running of the Club and gave a special thanks to outgoing President John Gregurke for his work over the last few years. He then declared all positions vacant and read through the nominations, proposers and seconders for each office and general committee position.

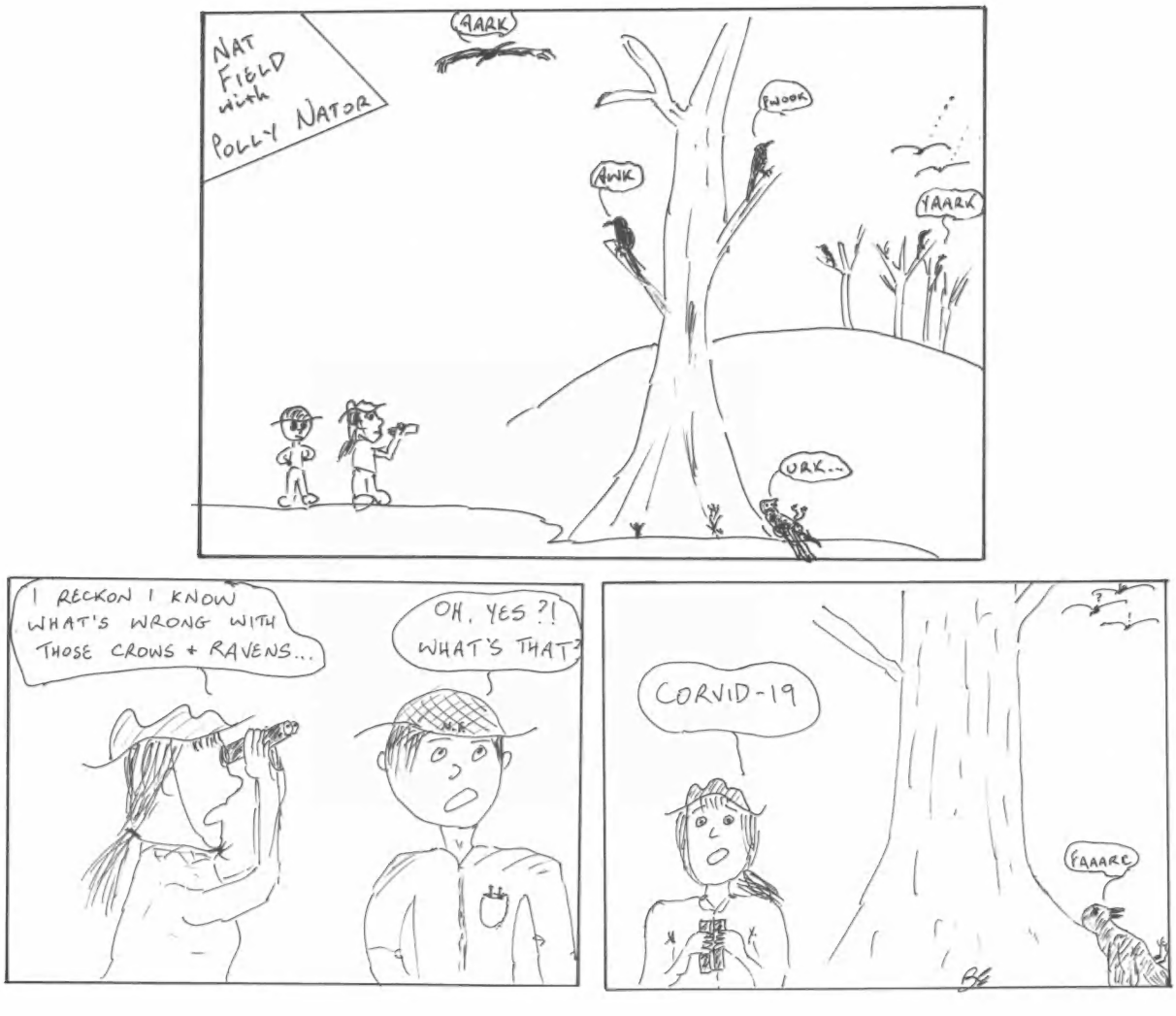
	Nominee	Proposer	Seconder
President:	William Elder	A. Arnold	V. Hocking
Vice Pres.:	Margaret Rich	W. Elder	J. Petheram
Secretary:	Emily Noble	W. Elder	J. Gregurke
Treasurer:	Kathryn Elder	J. Gregurke	M. Rich
Newsletter Editor:	William Elder	A. Arnold	V. Hocking

Committee: John Petheram, Andrew Arnold, Valerie Hocking, Leslie Hanrahan, Graeme Lunt and John Gregurke.

There being no further nominations and after acknowledging that all those nominated were eligible for election, Peter declared all positions filled. He also thanked outgoing committee members Fran Hanrahan and Elspeth Swan for their service to the Club on the committee.

Peter handed the meeting over to the new President, Bill Elder. Bill started by thanking both John Gregurke for his 30+ years of service in various offices, and for his ongoing committee representation, and those filling other committee positions this year. John P also thanked Elspeth on behalf of the Club for all of the work she puts into maintaining the Club's website and Facebook page, so essential to the wider promotion of the Club.

General Business: 2020-21 membership fees: Given the stable financial position of the Club, the Committee recommended to members that all subscription rates remain at 2019-20 levels—carried.



Members' Images—"Not What It Seems"

A wonderful assortment of the cryptic and the weird and wonderful was the treat for members at this year's AGM. Val Hocking's photos of the very strange, and rare, velvet fungus were a highlight.

Andy Arnold showed us an unidentified "looper" larva feeding on the leaves of "Pepino" *Solanum muricatum* (Family Solanaceae)

Claire and Peter Dalman found the topic challenging but thought hard and came up with some pictures. A masked booby chick on a grassy hillside on Norfolk Island looked like a pile of white, fluffy litter until closer examination revealed a beak and a parent bird was seen a little distance away.

A cross section of a Norfolk Island pine revealed why these trees were disappointingly useless for masts or structural use as hoped by Captain Cook.

Claire & Peter Dalman *continued*

A motor boat of men with a car fridge but no fishing rods turned out to be a group about to raid sooty tern eggs on a nearby island. There is a short period when this is permitted, early in the nesting season, as the birds lay again. Locals either love or loathe the fishy tasting eggs.

From Montreal botanic gardens museum was a huge, extremely well camouflaged stick insect and a small insect very difficult to discern from the rose thorns in lives amongst. A picture showed a thorny devil from Western Australia being handled. Despite appearing spiky, it is fairly soft.

Membership due

Thanks to all members who have paid their 2020 membership so far. The best way now to pay your membership is by direct deposit, with your name as the reference, to the following bank account:

Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Inc.
BSB: 633000 A/c No: 119112290

Ordinary Member $35; Family $55; Distant $20;
Newsletter postage $12 extra

Receipts will be issued next time we meet(!?), but if you'd like yours earlier, please let Kathy know and it can be scanned/emailed to you.

FRAN HANRAHAN

At our last Annual General Meeting Fran retired from the FNCB Committee. Fran is a quiet achiever and an active member of the Club.

Of interest (though Fran felt it was not really about the Club so therefore should not be in this piece) is that her family have been in the Ballarat region for 150 years. Her great grandfather was the captain of the Pikemen at the Eureka Stockade battle and a great uncle was one of the 13 men put on trial for treason following the battle.

Fran grew up on the family potato farm in Bungaree. Her earliest memory of noticing Australian plants was when her father directed her to the 'whitewood' tree which she later learned was really a blackwood. Her next encounter with Australian native plants was as a school girl on a biology excursion in Yr. 11 to a bush block on the outskirts of Ballarat, now the site of Damascus school in Mt Helen. This was the first time she really started looking at plants and remembers sundews, egg and bacon plants and greenhood orchids.

She went on to make geology a special study, gaining an exhibition in Matriculation (Year 12) and then studied geology at Melbourne University, Part 1 by correspondence for a year with assistance from Phil Day of SMB. She continued her studies, completing a degree in physics followed by study specialising in mathematics education. Fran's career in education included extended periods working in Namibia, Fiji, New Guinea, Malawi and, for a shorter time, in Timor Leste - more than 14 years in all.

Fran has been a member of FNCB since 2000. She has led excursions for the Club and given talks focusing on geology. After her time teaching in Namibia, she gave a talk about their plants and geology. She often wrote reports for the newsletter.

In 2002-3 Fran sometimes stood in for Carol Hall as editor of the FNCB Newsletter and took up the position in 2004 and from 2007 to 2018 until she shared 2019 with Bill Elder who has done it since. As the Newsletter Editor she was also responsible for preparing the Club syllabus of activities for most of those years. Fran was Vice President of the Club from 2012 until her retirement this year. Fran is generous, thoughtful and good humoured, so thank goodness she remains an active member of FNCB.

(Margaret Rich)

Member's images continued…
Emily's tribute to all things eucalypt leaf was a fascinating insight into often the most obvious and the most overlooked part of our native plants.
Below is a gum leave caterpillar having just shed its skin, ready to continue devouring a leaf or two.
More of her images and a full report in next month's issue.

And… Bill Elder revealed two Tawny Frogmouth chicks hiding in plain view next to mum.

The Rat Nats—Juniors Group

Unfortunately, the Junior Group has had to postpone meetings and outings at Stringybark due to ongoing concerns with the coronavirus outbreak. While we want you to continue exploring nature and being outside generally, we also don't want to expose anyone to illness.

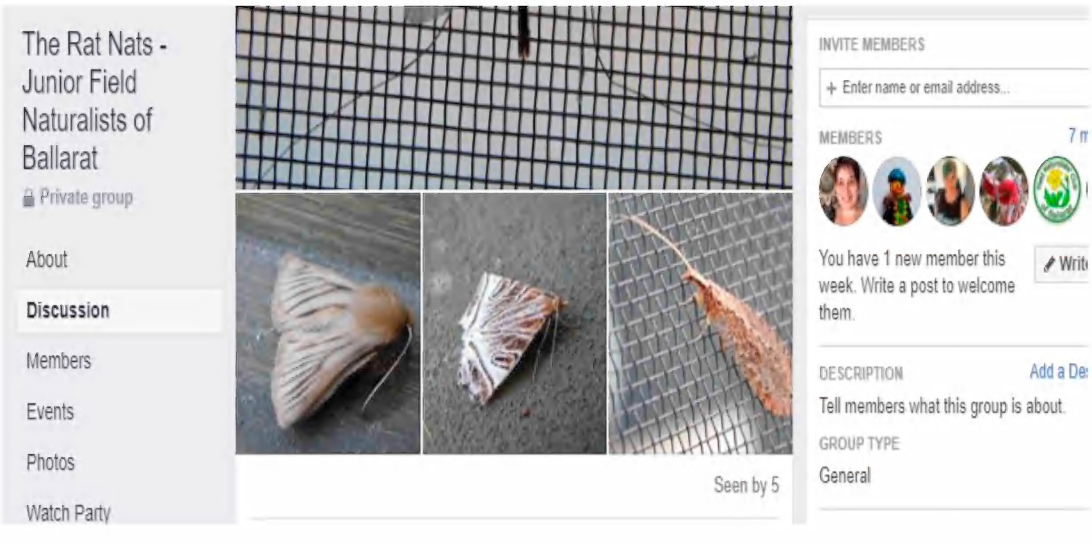
We are working on some online avenues for Juniors to share photos of things they see, and share other nature stories.

Also, we missed out on hosting an event for Nature Play Week this year, but everyone is still encouraged to get out there and play in nature as much as you can. And don't worry, we'll join in with Nature Play Week again next year!

Finally, here's a joke or two to share:

What do you call a chicken at the North Pole? Lost

What sound do echidnas make when they kiss? Ouch!



Juniors now on Facebook!

Facebook is a popular site that allows people to stay connected and share their experiences. Thanks to club web person and blogger, Elspeth, we have created a private group in Facebook, linked to the main Field Nats page. Because it is private, Rat Nats have to request to join, but once in, you can read all about what others have seen and done—and you can contribute your own pictures, videos and more.

Get online and stay in touch now. We'd love to see what you're finding out there—in the bush, in the backyard, in the compost or under the pile of clothes in your room!

Extract of Club Meeting Minutes—March 6, 2020

Opening and Apologies

Attendance: New President Bill Elder welcomed 28 members and two visitors. Apologies: Chris & Anna Baulch, Shirley Faull, Mark Moravec, Elaine Gregurke, Ken Hammond, Paul Norquay, Wayne McGuire, Rob Scott and Wayne Walker.

Motion: that the Apologies be accepted.
Moved: D. Thurgood Seconded: E. Reynolds Carried.

Minutes of the previous Meeting

Motion: that the Minutes of the previous Meeting (Feb. 7, 2020) be accepted as a true and correct record.
Moved: A. Arnold Seconded: C. Hall Carried.

Correspondence Report: Distributed prior to the meeting.

Motion: That the Inwards Correspondence be accepted and the Outwards Correspondence be approved.
Moved: J. Gregurke Seconded: E. Swan Carried.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

Creswick Trails Project update, including Freedom of Information requests: John P. Discussion of the planned project with a number of different agencies and organisations including Environmental Justice Australia led to the development of a list of possible applications for FOI. About 50 possible items were then whittled down to make 8 applications, spread across four organisations. These were available for members to read at the meeting. The information in the documents requested is considered necessary to inform our response to the upcoming Planning Application for the Trail.

Motion: That FNCB make the short-listed FOI requests, spending $29.60 on each of the 4 requests.
Moved: J. Petheram Seconded: V. Hocking Carried.

Draft Woowookarung Regional Park trail rationalisation plan feedback letter was prepared by John G and John P and sent to Parks Victoria a week ago, with a copy for members to read at the meeting.

Reports:
Treasurer's Report:

Opening bal:	$11,910.06
Income	$ 90.00
Expenses	$ 253.00
Closing bal:	$11,747.06

Motion: that the Treasurer's Report be accepted and invoices tabled be approved for payment.
Moved: K. Elder Seconded: A. Arnold Carried.

Rat Nats (Junior Group) update:
Bill E reported on the February gathering of the Rat Nats, focusing on insects for the four children and accompanying adults attending. They looked for insects in the field and scrutinised some under various magnifications. Elspeth is in the process of setting up a closed Facebook group for members of the Rat Nats.

Peter N reported on the Central Highlands Environmental Volunteers' Networking Event on Feb. 29 which was hosted by Ballarat Environment Network and Victorian Environment Friends Network.
70 people attended (including 7 field nats) representing 40 different groups. Many gave a 2-3 minute overview of the group they were involved in and what they were working to achieve.
There were guest speakers from City of Ballarat, Hepburn Shire Council, Glenelg Hopkins CMA, DELWP and Geelong FNC, and much great feedback was received. Andy endorsed Pete's report about the value of the day for networking.

General Business
Membership Renewals now due. The Treasurer will appreciate members tendering correct payment in cash or please note your name in the reference if paying by EFT.

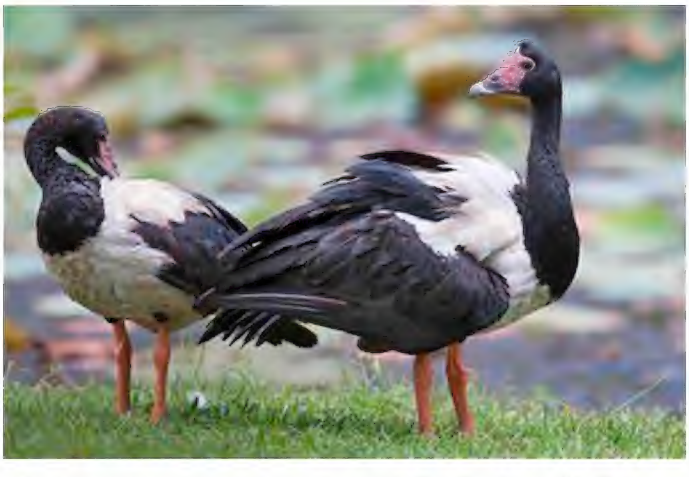
Bill E noted that we have changed our newsletter printer. They are now being printed by Waller & Chester in Scott Pde. Ballarat

Show & Tell/ Field Reports

Graeme showed footage from the fauna survey camera set up on his Lal Lal property including Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Feather-tail Glider, Owlet Nightjar, Black Wallaby, Sugar Glider and Grey Shrike-thrush.

Emily reported that the Autumn orchid season has started: Bearded and Sharp Midge-orchids (right) are flowering, as are Parson's Bands and the fungi season has started early too at Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary, Linton and Enfield State Forest, Scarsdale.

Elspeth was taken to see a large flock of Magpie Geese (estimated to be 2,600 birds by members of Geelong FNC) at Balliang.



Les saw a juvenile Brown Goshawk feeding on a rabbit in his paddock at dusk at Bungaree.

Andy mentioned an article in the February edition of the Victorian Entomologist featuring Lasioglossum bees. He was sad to find that the Dainty Swallowtail pupae he was keeping an eye on in his Alfredton garden had holes chewed in the side of the pupae. He fears they have been predated by European Wasps.

Denis thinks he is seeing a lot more Black Kites than usual in the Beaufort area.

John Morrish observed 100s of Welcome Swallows flocking at Lake Wendouree and wondered where they go to?

Val discovered that Cosgrove Reservoir in Creswick was a good birding area. She spotted a Brown Goshawk and Sacred Kingfisher on a visit there in mid-February.

Western Treatment Plant Excursion 8 March 2020

Twelve people travelled in three cars to the Western Treatment Plant near Werribee. Each car had a permit holder with keys to open locked gates at WTP. We arrived in pleasant sunshine but there was a brisk easterly wind.

In the first T-Section pond Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints and Pied Stilt were close to the Road. Eastern Great Egret and Purple Swamphen were seen in the reeds. Yellow-billed Spoonbill were feeding in shallow water as were Black Duck, Hardhead, Hoary -headed Grebe and Australasian Grebe. Whistling Kite and Swamp Harrier flew overhead. Some ponds held large flocks of Eurasian Coot. Welcome Swallow and Fairy Martin were flying around. House Sparrows were seen on a boxthorn. Golden-headed Cisticola perched on reeds and White-fronted Chat were along the track edges. In a shallow pond a large flock of Red-necked Avocet were feeding and a closer inspection through the telescope revealed that many Banded Stilt were feeding with them. Curlew Sandpipers with down-curved bills were also present. A Glossy Ibis was seen feeding in a grassy area with Straw-necked and Australian White Ibis flying around.

We went into the Western Lagoons area for morning tea near a group of Royal Ibis and a few Masked Lapwings. Travelling east we saw Marsh Sandpiper and Brown Falcon. At the eastern end we stopped to see more waders and on the dried edge saw Black-fronted Dotterel and White-front Chat. We were just about to leave when Val draw our attention to a parrot bathing on the edge of an outfall drain. At first we thought it was a Blue-winged Parrot but after looking at bird guides the bright green back and wings and yellow front was more like Orange-bellied Parrot.

This was confirmed when we looked at images on Carol's and Peter's cameras which showed the orange belly and bands on left and right legs. Carol sent images to DELWP and a local Birdlife member who has been involved in Orange-bellied Parrot work at WTP said the bird was a captive-bred bird released in 2019 at The Spit/Western Lagoons area.

As we travelled along the coast there were large numbers of birds on sand bars including Black Swan, Grey and Chestnut Teal, Australian Pelican and Australian Pied Oystercatcher.

While driving we saw some bush birds – Magpie, Magpie-lark, Willie Wagtail, Red Wattlebird and European Goldfinch. Along the coast, birds were roosting on exposed rocks and shallow sand where we were able to identify Bar-tailed Godwit and Crested Tern. Musk Duck were seen in the deeper ponds. We sheltered from the cold wind in the birdhide at Little River for lunch. It was high tide so there was no sand exposed for resting waders.

After lunch we crossed the Little River and travelled further east. Few new species were seen. An immature Australasian Gannet was seen on a rock. At a major outfall four species of cormorant were perched on the concrete structure – Little Pied, Great, Little Black and Pied Cormorant.

Our final stop was at Lake Borrie where Pink-eared Duck and Australasian Shoveler not seen earlier in the day were present.

A total of 62 species were seen on the day.

Banded Stilt *Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*

(The full bird list is also published on the FNCB website)

Bird list FNCB excursion to Western Treatment Plant 8th March 2020 - compiled by John Gregurke

Musk Duck
Black Swan
Australian Shelduck
Pink-eared Duck
Australasian Shoveler
Grey Teal
Chestnut Teal
Pacific Black Duck
Hardhead
Australasian Grebe
Hoary-headed Grebe
Crested Pigeon
Australasian Gannet
Little Pied Cormorant
Great Cormorant
Little Black Cormorant
Pied Cormorant
Australian Pelican
Eastern Great Egret
White-faced Heron
Glossy Ibis
Australian White Ibis
Straw-necked Ibis
Royal Spoonbill
Yellow-billed Spoonbill
Black-shouldered Kite
Whistling Kite
Black Kite
Swamp Harrier
Brown Falcon
Purple Swamphen
Eurasian Coot
Australian Pied Oystercatcher
Pied Stilt
Banded Stilt
Red-necked Avocet
Black-fronted Dotterel
Masked Lapwing
Bar-tailed Godwit
Marsh Sandpiper
Red-necked Stint
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
Curlew Sandpiper
Fairy Tern
Whiskered Tern
Crested Tern
Silver Gull
Orange-bellied Parrot
Superb Fairy-wren
Red Wattlebird
White-fronted Chat
Australian Magpie
Willie Wagtail
Little Raven
Magpie-lark
Golden-headed Cisticola
Little Grassbird
Welcome Swallow
Fairy Martin
Common Starling
House Sparrow
European Goldfinch

Total species 62

Stop press—or rather the opposite.
The committee has decided to continue printing the newsletter to ensure that members have the opportunity to maintain their collection of hard copies. Newsletters will be available for distribution when we return to normal - whenever that is! - All the best and stay safe at home (Ed)

CALENDAR 2020

Coronavirus Precautions

As members are well aware, the coronavirus outbreak has led to basic changes in the way we interact socially. The committee has suspended all meetings and formal excursions of the club until further notice.

The committee has found ways to meet that don't expose us to risk of infection. Our last meeting was conducted as a telephone conference using two mobile phones and involved ten callers!

We are also exploring innovative online methods such as Zoom, Skye, Hangouts and others. Instead of the meeting scheduled for April, Bill and Andy are working on an online presentation that will be shared with members who can view it on their computer at their leisure.

Members will also be able to share their field reports online - stay tuned for details of which program /s we select.

Bill Elder - President, FNCB

Committee

President	Bill Elder
Vice Pres	Margaret Rich
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Kathy Elder
	Andy Arnold
	John Gregurke
	Les Hanrahan
	Val Hocking
	Graeme Lunt
	John Petheram

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Treasurer Kathy Elder

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Meetings and Excursions are cancelled until further notice.

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